ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A user's action of depicting a vision is closely associated with image retrieval. Images are selected with each stroke made in order to paint a color or a draw a line on a canvas at a step of creating a retrieval key. The resultant images and corresponding areas within the images are presented to a user. Thus, the user can create the retrieval key while looking at the results of retrieval. Owing to this technique, even a person who is poor at drawing a picture can retrieve images as if to draw a picture. One attribute information or a plurality of attribute information items is selected from among attribute information items prepared in advance. The attribute information is assigned to a designated area. Images having area-attribute information produced using the attribute information in combination with information specifying the area are retrieved from an image database, and then provided. Moreover, corresponding areas within the retrieved images in which attribute information common to the retrieved images is found are detected. The corresponding areas within the retrieved images are displayed in a corresponding area on a display device.